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United for Quality Care

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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Yvonne Foster. I am a CNA at Windsor Health & Rehab. Working with the elderly is a field that was very easy for me to adapt to, as in my Culture this is our way of giving back to our elders. I have to work 70-80 hours a week, not because I want to but because I have to. I have been at Windsor Health & Rehab for 20 years and am only making \$17.00 an hour. I have co-workers who have been there for 40 years and do not make \$20.00 an hour, who will soon be retiring with their last paycheck. There is no room for growth or advancement. The wages at Windsor Health & Rehab are lower than most other nursing homes, which makes staffing more challenging. This worries me. I am tired of seeing my co-workers leave to go work in other facilities or leave the industry altogether to go work in other fields. The benefits and wages for nursing homes should be equal across the board. This would help to create consistency for residents.

During the first wave of the Covid pandemic, I remember being separated from my family. It was extremely difficult to be separated from my 13 year old daughter. I was stuck at work for 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, with multiple jobs from different departments. I would have to be the caregiver, as well as the housekeeper. Many of my co-workers were scared and fearful. I had to find someone to care for my daughter, who is the youngest of my three children. We were only able to speak on the phone, as I feared of taking the virus home with me. I had to take care of every single patient that had the virus. I was the direct caregiver for that Covid positive floor. I know that there had to have been a God that was there with me during this difficult time. I would pray going into work and pray leaving work. I cried after the first wave of Covid was over and I did my first Covid test. I could not believe that it was negative. I did not catch the virus. Looking back, I know that God protected me because someone had to be there to care for these residents.

Despite the chronic staffing issues at Windsor Health & Rehab, with many days leaving 1 aide to care for 30 residents and 1 aide caring for up to 60 residents at night, the facility is allowed to accept admissions with very little staff to care for the patients. The State should not make it this easy for operators to open nursing homes and treat their employees this way by paying us these low wages for such a difficult job.

We serve with our heart, but we feel like we disappoint our own families. Low wages force Black and Brown families to live in rundown communities, where our children are exposed to drugs, guns, and violence. We are willing to work hard, but the system sets us up for failure. With such low wages and high inflation in this State, I have had to cancel my medical insurance for this year in order to put food on my table. No employee who works 40 hours a week in this industry should not be able to afford health insurance and not be able to pay their bills. We cannot take care of our own families. We are faced with struggling to keep our own children in college. We want to give them a better education than we had, but we cannot afford it. Many children of our Black and Brown families are dropping out of college because parents like me cannot afford to pay for college. Instead we have to work two jobs or put in overtime up to 80 hours a week, which leaves very little time to spend with or care for our own families.

Something is seriously wrong with this picture. We care about the residents that we take care of. We know how hard we work. Please stop telling us that you care about these residents and staff. Show us that you care and help us take care of our own families. Please allocate funding to Nursing Homes so we can attract and retain the staff that we need to help alleviate our staffing crisis.

Thank you for your time.